

Soldiers *Online*

SURVEYING SOLDIER CONCERNS

"Young leaders today joined to serve the nation or they wouldn't have volunteered to potentially put themselves in harm's way. At the same time, the new generation is a little more impatient when changes need to be made."

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer

REVAMPING training manuals, revising officer-evaluation reports, sending new lieutenants to basic training and making resident Command and General Staff College available to all majors were among the 84 recommendations the Army Training and Leader Development Panel recently made to Army Chief of Staff GEN Eric K. Shinseki.

The ATLDP was formed in June 2000 to assess training and leader development within the Army.

Survey teams visited 61 locations worldwide and talked to more than 13,500 officers and NCOs, said LTG Mike Steele, commander of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., who heads the panel. It was the largest training and leader-development survey of officers the Army has ever conducted.

"We found some interesting things," Steele said.

"The best thing we found, from my perspective — contrary to the many documents I've read about a generation gap between senior and junior leaders — is that the gap simply doesn't exist," Steele said.

Young leaders today share the same service ethic as "all generations of soldiers before them have had," Steele said. "They joined to serve the nation or they wouldn't have volunteered to potentially put themselves in harm's way. At the same time, the new generation is a little more impatient when changes need to be made."



LTG Mike Steele, commander of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., headed the Army Training and Leader Development Panel.

The ATLDP's recommendations are very candid and uncensored, Steele said. Feedback to Shinseki comes directly from soldiers in the field, so he can understand exactly what they think of the Army.

In what Steele called the "Army culture" — a balance between the beliefs and practices of the institution — the panel learned that soldiers will accept "a little bit of 'out of balance.'" They recognize there's always going to be some friction between what we believe and what the institution's policies are."

But, Steele said, the panel learned that soldiers have some significant concerns.

Unit Operations

Soldiers reported lots of friction, due to late taskings and back-to-back deployments that affect mission-essential-task-list training.

“Many of our training policies create a culture that forces our senior leaders to think about training their higher headquarters. It takes battalion and brigade commanders away from their units and hampers their ability to concentrate on training within their organizations,” Steele said.

Operational Tempo

OPTEMPO has increased more than 300 percent in the last decade, Steele said. But soldiers didn’t complain about being too busy. They complained about the unpredictability of deployments, which prevents them from being able to plan vacations and other time with their families.

The issue of OPTEMPO came up repeatedly, Steele said, so much so that spouses who weren’t initially part of the ATLDP target audience were also polled. “They told us exactly what we’d heard from service members,” Steele said. They talked about the unpredictability in their lives and the need to have quality family time.

At the same time, Steele said, spouses echoed the sentiments of soldiers when they talked about the Army. “They had a strong sense of pride in service to the nation,” he said.

Surprisingly, pay, retirement, health-care benefits and housing were not among spouses’ primary concerns, Steele said. “They talked about those things almost as an after-thought.

“Their real message to us was that their spouses are serving the nation and the Army because they have pride in both, and joined because they felt that the commitment would be rewarded with a commitment from the organization,” Steele said.

Spouses said that when soldiers aren’t satisfied with their jobs and the Army is not meeting their expectations, that dissatisfaction manifests itself at home. And when the operational pace leads to unpredictability, it has a negative impact on family life.

Micromanagement

Many junior officers said that, rather than have senior



Officers surveyed said they should not be raced through qualifying assignments, but should rather be allowed to spend more time as platoon leaders and in brigade-and-below positions to gain quality experience.

leaders provide very prescriptive training scenarios and policies that tell them exactly what to do on a daily basis, they would prefer being given the resources to create their own plans to solve problems and learn by doing so, Steele said.

Officer Efficiency Reports

Officers said they have not fully accepted the latest OER. They do not like the term “center of mass,” forced distribution and senior rater profile-management strategies.

Officer Personnel Management System

OPMS tends to focus “on a road map to success, rather than on quality within an operational assignment, especially a branch-qualifying assignment like platoon leader, company commander, operations officer and so on,” Steele said.

Officers certainly need to move up, Steele said. “But the system today races our officers through qualifying assignments, with little regard for the quality of the job and the experience the leader obtains” while in a particular position.

Retention for Junior Leaders

Lieutenants and captains cited job satisfaction, realization of leader-development expectations, and opportunities to serve at brigade level and below as chief concerns.

Soldiers often serve in TDA units for which their basic courses did not prepare them, Steele said.

The idea of having a future at the 10-year mark was also a concern. "Army education policy today selects 50 percent of our majors to attend an intermediate-level resident course at Fort Leavenworth. The other 50 percent have to get it by some other means," Steele said. Officers see this as a discriminator.

Some of the panel's recommendations, such as those to change policy, could result in almost immediate fixes, Steele said. Others, such as changing the officer-education system, will probably take longer to implement. The bottom line is that Army officers will no doubt see some far-reaching changes in the future.

In the meantime, the ATLDP will conduct studies of the NCO and warrant officer corps. Preliminary work began in January to identify subject-matter experts for the NCO study. Field surveys of 34,000 NCOs began in May. □

Panel Recommendations

Among the panel's 84 recommendations to the chief of staff are:

- ✓ Offer stabilized tours to soldiers whose children are high school seniors.
- ✓ Develop a five-year calendar that includes all training center rotations, deployments to Bosnia, and other rotations.
- ✓ Give soldiers a one-year notice of PCS.
- ✓ Rewrite training manuals, FM 25-100 and FM 25-101.
- ✓ Schedule four-day training holidays in conjunction with national holidays.
- ✓ Review tasks and eliminate non-mission essential ones that compete with combat training.
- ✓ Require general officer approval for active-Army weekend garrison training.
- ✓ Enforce current training doctrine and keep lieutenants in platoon-level jobs for at least one year to gain leadership experience.
- ✓ Rewrite the Officer Personnel Management regulation, AR 600-3.
- ✓ Update the World War II-era Officer Education System.
- ✓ Refurbish the Army's training centers.

Forming the Panel

THE ATLDP was formed soon after the winter 2000 Association of the United States Army symposium at Fort Lauderdale, Fla., when Army Chief of Staff GEN Eric K. Shinseki announced his vision for the Army, said LTG Mike Steele, commander of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kan.

"When we were dealing with readiness, transformation and people, the initial focus was on readiness and on the transformation process," Steele said.

"The focus was on platforms and weapon systems, then people," he said. "The chief started thinking about how he could focus on people as we went through the transformation process."

And in April, he and former Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera



In the future, officers like this nurse at the Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, hospital should have a better chance to attend the Command and General Staff College.

published a blue-ribbon panel charter. That charter, for conducting the studies and blue-ribbon panel, was given to GEN John Abrams, commander of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command.

Steele's initial task was to form two panels — one for training and one for leader development. "But as we started our work, it became apparent that training and leader development are inextricably linked," he said. So Steele recommended that the two panels be combined, "to better get to the relationship between training and leader development."

ATLDP was subsequently formed in early June.

Shinseki directed that it be "a study conducted by the field and for our soldiers and leaders in the field," Steele said. "So rather than forming the study group and the panel from members of the Army staff and operating agencies or agencies within TRADOC, we identified the talents we needed in subject matter experts across the Army."

"Industry and academia provided us their best people," Steele said. And major commands provided 51 officers, from captains to colonels, who were assigned to the ATLDP for 90 days. The panel was also demographically oriented for balance ethnically, by sex and by branch.

It was divided into four study groups that conducted mission analysis, developed survey instruments with the help of Army Research Institute employees and, ultimately, conducted the fieldwork.

While the Army Research Institute helped the panel design the survey materials, those actually doing the research were soldiers, Steele said.

One group targeted the Army culture — or Army operating environment, Steele said. The other groups targeted training, the officer education system, and mentoring and self-development. — Heike Hasenauer